

Meet K Syeed, Coimbatore's tree whisperer

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COIMBATORE: Leaders of countries across the world may have pledged to grow one million trees by 2030 during the UN Climate Change Conference COP27 in November last. But the grassroots change is brought about by uncelebrated people rooted in quaint vicinities flung far from the world of parleys and summits.

Meet K Syeed from Coimbatore town who has saved over 600 trees from illegal felling over the last two decades. The man is a mystery to many as he is seen speaking to ailing trees at times. Even so, when the trees begin to recuperate eventually following the regular tête-a-tête, the

residents here can only wonder what secrets lay concealed in nature.

When the 44-year-old recently came to know that the peepal tree that was transplanted on Rathinam college campus six years ago from roadside near Eachanari was not flourishing at the new spot, he soon decided to make a new friend. He kept visiting the tree and striking 'conversations' with it. The tree is thriving now, said locals.

One weekday morning, Syeed was busy readying his children for school, when his neighbour alerted him about arrangements being made to axe a tree at Ondipudur. Instead of dropping his kids at school, Syeed lugged them along to the spot at once.

"We reached there just in time. It took three hours to persuade the building owner to budge. After saving that age-old tree, I left my children at school in the afternoon. School can wait, schooling can't," Syeed said. He has also gathered like-minded people and formed a team against deforestation.

They not only prevent the axing of trees, they also move legally against those laying to waste nature through the revenue department, which is the custodian of land and trees. Some time ago, the highways department applied for approval from the revenue department for axing 180 trees along Siruvani road, and permission was granted to bring 78 trees to the ground.

"We couldn't believe it when the order came. A team of environmentalists conducted a field inspection and reduced the number of trees that were required to be cut to 38. Likewise, we have stopped cutting of trees at various locations," he added.

Syeed and his teammates realised they could achieve much more if they worked jointly with government officials. They started an initiative to transplant trees eight years ago, and they have helped nearly 1,000 trees turn a new leaf so far. "I hope governments in the future earmark lands parcels exclusively for planting trees," he added.

If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a sound? The answer is a resounding yes; the sound of the earth mourning a beloved dweller's demise. But, not all of us can hear it.

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